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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE  
27 February 1961

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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Belgian Parliamentary Elections on  
26 March 1961.

1. Offices to be filled: All 212 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the 106 directly elected seats of the 175-mandate Senate. Provincial Councils will be elected at the same time, and they in turn will select most of the remaining senators.

2. Background and principal issues: The regular quadrennial elections would have been held in June 1962. However, the three major parties--the governing Social Christians (Roman Catholic) and Liberals and the opposition Socialists--believe that new elections will give the country a fresh start after a series of crises including the Congo trouble, the strike against the government's austerity and economic expansion bill (*loi unique*), and the current wave of anti-Belgian demonstrations around the world sparked by Lumumba's death; and will lead to the formation of a government which can function without being restricted by impending elections.

The principal issue in the election will be the government's economic program and the Socialist-instigated strike against it. The three major parties agree that Belgium's lagging economy needs stimulation but disagree as to the means. The Socialists have attacked the government's "*loi unique*" as bearing too heavily on low-income groups. On the other hand, the Social Christians will seek to capitalize on widespread public resentment against the violent 34-day strike by the Socialist unions in an effort to block the legislation. The Liberals, as the more conservative member of the incumbent coalition, will attack the Socialists more vigorously and also probably accuse their coalition

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partners of watering down the "loi unique" by not applying social service cuts before the election. The Social Christians are obliged to follow a middle course in order not to offend their trade union wing.

The Congo debacle and the ineffective policies of the Eyskens government will also be an issue. However, public criticism of the government will be overshadowed by 1) the strike issue, and 2) the tendency of the country to stand together in the face of foreign attacks on Belgium over the Lumumba affair.

Walloon separatism, that is, the desire of the French-speaking Walloon region in South Belgium for more regional autonomy, is not likely to be an issue but will constitute an undertone. The left-wing Socialists, particularly André Renard, will probably seek to appeal to regional chauvinism in Wallonia.

### 3. Present Party Strengths:

<u>Party</u>	<u>1958 parliamentary elections</u>		<u>Seats in</u>	
	<u>popular vote</u>	<u>% of votes</u>	<u>Chamber</u>	<u>Senate*</u>
<u>Left</u>				
Belgian Communist Party	100,113	1.89	2	1
<u>Left-of-Center</u>				
Socialist Party (PSB)	1,897,303	35.79	84	65
<u>Center</u>				
Social Christians (PSC)	2,464,924	46.50	104	91
<u>Right-of-Center</u>				
Liberals	585,620	11.05	21	18
Flemish Christian People's Union	104,593	1.97	1	0
Socialist-Liberal Cartel	111,242	2.10	**	
Other	36,840	0.70	0	

\*Total number of seats in Senate is 175. 106 are directly elected, remainder by Provincial Councils and Senate itself.

\*\*Seats are included in totals for parties to which they pertain.

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4. Outstanding personalities:

a. Spaak, Paul Henri: Outstanding Socialist politician and statesman, and former prime minister and foreign minister; resigned as secretary general of NATO to lead the Socialist election campaign. Spaak is strongly pro-US and pro - European integration.

b. Acker, Achille Van: Socialist prime minister 1954-58 and a leading figure in the Chamber of Deputies; a moderate.

c. Renard, André: Deputy secretary general of the Belgian General Workers' Federation (FGTB); a militant left-winger and opportunist. He was the leader of the recent strike by Socialist trade unions against the government's economic austerity bill. He is seeking to inflame Walloon separatism.

d. Lefevre, Theodore: Chairman of the Social Christian party and a member of the Chamber of Deputies, he leans toward the labor wing of his party and favors parliamentary and cabinet cooperation with the Socialists.

e. Motz, Roger: Chairman of the Liberal party, he represents the more conservative element in the party.

f. Lefebvre, René: Liberal interior minister and leader of Liberals in cabinet.

5. Informed opinion on the outcome:

Public resentment over the abortive strike by the Socialist trade unions is expected to help the Social Christians increase their representation. The Socialists are expected to suffer a decline, although Spaak's presence on the scene may tend to reassure those middle-class members who have been shocked and offended by the activities of the left wing during the strike. The Liberals

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hope to gain both votes and seats as a result of public discontent over the strike and the ambivalent position of the Social Christians. The small Communist party may, according to the assistant national secretary of the Socialist party, increase its vote in Wallonia, where left-wing Socialists within both the party and the General Federation of Belgian Workers feel that the moderate leaders in Brussels did not vigorously support the recent strike.

There is a strong possibility that a Social Christian - Socialist coalition government will be formed after the election. Moderate elements in both parties, including Spaak and Social Christian chairman Lefevre, favor such an alliance. However, the conservative wing of the Social Christians prefers cooperation with the Liberals, who are essentially conservative except in their anti-clericalism; and gains by the Liberals would increase prospects for a resumption of the Social Christian - Liberal coalition.

6. Significance for the US:

Spaak's re-entry into a post-election government, probably as foreign minister, would serve to stimulate Belgium's lagging defense effort and also lead to a more coherent direction of foreign and Congo affairs. A resumption of the Social Christian - Liberal coalition would probably not lead to any improvement in Belgium's defense posture.

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